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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 4 October 1996 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On 2 October 1996 the Council of Ministers of the French Republic adopted some important decisions relating to anti-personnel mines. They are summarized in the document annexed hereto.

I draw your attention, in particular, to the commitment made by France to refrain from the use of anti-personnel mines, and to my country's determination to arrive at a legally binding and verifiable international agreement on a total and comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament, which appears to be the appropriate forum for negotiations in this area.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 71 of the agenda.

(Signed) Alain DEJAMMET
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

I

On 2 October 1996 the Council of Ministers adopted the following guidelines concerning France's contribution to the global campaign against anti-personnel mines:

1. France confirms its decision to refrain from producing and exporting anti-personnel mines. The Government will submit a bill designed to give legislative effect to these commitments. It will report to Parliament on the progress of the international campaign against anti-personnel mines and the contribution which our country has made thereto.

2. France proposes to arrive at a legally binding and verifiable international agreement on a total and comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines. Hence, it will refrain from the use of anti-personnel mines, except where such use is absolutely necessary to protect its forces. In the latter case, any exception could be authorized only by a decision of the governmental authorities. Anti-personnel mines would be used strictly in accordance with safety requirements and in complete conformity with the international conventions in force.

3. France will continue with the reduction by destruction of its stockpile of anti-personnel mines initiated in September 1996.

II

These decisions have far-reaching implications.

France is the first permanent member of the Security Council to adopt a doctrine based on such a strict ban on the use of anti-personnel mines.

France's choice of a non-use doctrine is particularly significant in the light of its international responsibilities and the involvement of its troops in global peacekeeping efforts.

This new doctrine admits of no geographical exceptions; it applies to all categories of anti-personnel mines, and has been adopted for an indefinite period.

The sole exception to the proposed ban is highly restrictive, as it requires a decision by the governmental authorities, based on the absolute necessity of ensuring the safety of our forces.

Secondly, the Government is submitting to Parliament a bill which will give legislative effect to the commitments undertaken previously to refrain from producing and exporting anti-personnel mines.

Such a move is designed to meet the concern with giving a more legally binding effect to the commitments which we made to stop exporting (1993) and producing (1995) anti-personnel mines.

Thirdly, these guidelines meet the goal set by the President of the French Republic of "further mobilizing the international community to move towards a total and comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines".

France believes that these efforts will acquire their full meaning only through the adoption of a legally binding and verifiable international agreement on a total and comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines.

It hopes that the United Nations General Assembly will adopt an approach aimed at the rapid opening of multilateral negotiations for a ban on anti-personnel mines.

The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva appears to be the appropriate forum for negotiations. Political conferences, such as the one held at Ottawa, Canada, from 3 to 5 October 1996, should help to provide the momentum needed to move towards a ban on anti-personnel mines.

France calls upon all States to emulate its efforts.